

(U) CRYPTOLOGIC ALMANAC

[The following article is a reprint of an Almanac item from September 1998.]

(U) Baron Oshima's Contributions

(U) American cryptology provided the United States and its principal ally, the United Kingdom, with significant insights into Japanese and German strengths, intentions, and actions before and during World War II. This special insight enabled Allied generals to make wise decisions that saved many thousands of lives and shortened the war.

(U) One of the most productive of the cryptanalytic efforts was against the principal high-level Japanese diplomatic machine system, which the Americans nicknamed "PURPLE." Solved in 1940, PURPLE allowed American policymakers advance information and insight into Japanese negotiations before the outbreak of war in December 1941. Unfortunately, Japan's Foreign Ministry was not privy to Japanese military planning; thus the Americans received no warning about the Pearl Harbor attack from this source.

(U) However, PURPLE was a most valuable source of military information, not only about the Pacific Theater, as might be supposed, but about the war in Europe. Japan's ambassador to Germany, Baron Oshima Hiroshi, concurrently a lieutenant general in the Japanese Imperial Army, had been an early supporter of the Nazi Party and enjoyed good access to Adolf Hitler and other high-ranking German civil and military officials. He wrote regular and detailed reports on what he learned from his contacts; he had the reports encrypted in PURPLE and broadcast to Tokyo. The United States intercepted these messages, decrypted them, and had access to this treasure trove of first-hand information on its enemies.

(U) Oshima's reports gave the United States its only authentic information about combat on the Russo-German front. In late 1943 the Germans hosted Oshima on a tour of their defenses along the coast of France; the resultant eyewitness report from the enemy side was used by Eisenhower's staff in planning the D-Day invasion. At the end of the war in Europe, Oshima carefully described the collapse of the Third Reich. These reports were first given the codeword "MAGIC," then "ULTRA," when the United States and Great Britain standardized some cryptologic terminology.

(U) What happened to Baron Oshima as the war ended? In late March 1945 Oshima sent his wife, along with other diplomatic personnel, to Bad Gastein, south of Salzburg. Although Oshima had intended to stay in Berlin to the end, Hitler ordered diplomatic personnel out of Berlin, so in April Oshima joined his wife in Southern Germany; a skeleton staff was left behind to keep the Japanese embassy nominally in operation.

(U) At the end of the war, Major General Maxwell Taylor, commander of the 101st Airborne Division, moved his headquarters to Bad Gastein, also choosing to occupy the hotel at which Oshima and his staff were residing. When the Japanese tried to stall the Americans, General Taylor, a former language officer, told them off in very colloquial Japanese and evicted them.

(U) Oshima was shortly thereafter taken into custody and transferred to the United States. He was interrogated and, after the war ended, was allowed to return to Japan with other internees.

(U) In December 1945 Oshima was arrested, indicted, and in April 1946 was tried as a war criminal. In November 1948 he was found guilty of conspiracy against peace and sentenced to life imprisonment. He was paroled in December 1955 and pardoned in 1958. As historian Carl Boyd notes, "He died at the age of eighty-nine in Chigasaki, Japan, on 6 June 1975, never knowing that his mail had been read in Washington and London the whole time he was in Berlin during the war."

(U) The PURPLE machine on which Oshima's reports were encrypted did not survive the war intact; the Japanese staff broke it up and buried the largest remaining chunks in the underground air raid shelter associated with the Berlin embassy. These pieces were unearthed by the Americans after the war - the only remnants of the system which had proved so valuable to the Allies. The largest single piece from this PURPLE machine is now on display in the National Cryptologic Museum.

(This article has been adapted from Carl Boyd, Hitler's Japanese Confidant: General Oshima Hiroshi and MAGIC Intelligence, 1941-45.)

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